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ABSTRACT

This paper explores several theories of human development, with particular attention to the development of social interaction. Part 1 compares and contrasts major developmental theories, including those of Freud, Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg, Kegan, Fowler, and Selman. From birth to 1 year, infants are laying the foundation that will guide their later social interactions. Between years 2 and 5 the beginnings of autonomy and the dominance of egocentrism can be observed. Children ages 6 to 12 show concrete thinking, the emergence of the self-concept, the freedom from impulses, and the need to be successful. Youth, age 13 and older, show many precursors of adult attitudes and behaviors, with identity formation as a major issue, the possibility of abstract thought, and the beliefs of the community as a source of strength. Part 2 applies those theories to the expanding understanding of friendship, emphasizing the friendships of school-age children. Self-acceptance plays a crucial role in social interaction development. In Stage 1 of friendships, birth to 2 years, children play in each other's presence rather than with each other. Stage 2, ages 2 to 5, involves quickly changing friendships, characterized by creativity, joint fantasy, and shared imagination. Stage 3, ages 6 to 12, entails the emergence of reciprocity, shared activities, increasing peer influence, and the separation of self-perception from social status. Stage 4, ages 13 and following, is characterized by the recognition that friends have rights and relationships that are independent of oneself, increasing stability of self-esteem, and true moral thinking. (Contains 14 references.) (KDFB)

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Human Development Theories

A Comparison of Classic Human Development Theorists and the Implications for a Model of Developmental Social Interaction

Jim Ollhoff

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A Comparison of Classic Human Development Theorists and the Implications for a Model of Developmental Social Interaction

Objective and Abstract

This paper intends to explore the various theorists of human development, with particular attention to the development of social interaction. Part one compares and contrasts the major developmental theories, while part 2 applies those theories to the expanding understandings of friendship. The friendships of the school-age child are emphasized.

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Overview of the Social Development of Children

Social development can mean many things. Since most development is affected and effected by human interaction, I have included many theorists in the upcoming descriptions. Sigmund Freud (1937/1957) was the first major developmentalist. While his theories have generally lost acceptance, most other theories were built on his work. Erik Erikson (1963), Freud's student, described a life-stage theory that, while largely untestable, is still used today.

Jean Piaget (Beard, 1969) identified a series foundational stages, universal and invariant, determining our ability to understand and work with concepts. Moral development, the brainchild of Lawrence Kohlberg (1984), defines our growing understandings of ethical situations.

Robert Kegan (1982), with work based on Jane Loevinger, identifies the expanding ego and the relations with the world. James Fowler (1981) used the other developmentalists to bring to light a series of stages that identify how we think about issues of faith, spirituality, and our relationship with something larger. Robert Selman (Steuer, 1994) looked at the ways we take (and don't take) the perspectives of others into account when we think and act.

Each theorist looks at different aspects of a whole reality. There is a remarkable amount of similarity between the theories. For the most part, the theories can be grouped into stages. What I have called the *Four Stages of Childhood* are: Stage 1 (ages 0-1); Stage 2 (ages 2-5); Stage 3 (ages 6-12); and Stage 4 (ages 13 and up).

Growth and movement through the stages, occurs when the self is lost and a new self is created (Kegan, 1982).

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Stage 1: Ages 0-1

Stage 1 is largely a matter of bodily functions. Many of the theorists do not even mention these first two years, because they believe little social development can go on. Piaget labels this stage *sensorimotor*, learning only what can be achieved kinesthetically. Fowler passes this stage off as *undifferentiated*, although giving a nod to Erikson's theory.

Freud called this stage the *oral stage*, believing that the libido's needs are met orally. While Freud's theories are not very influential in and of themselves today, Freud identified what we would today call bonding. Erikson surely takes a lesson from Freud and identifies *trust and mistrust* as the key psychosocial crisis at this age. Even though infants are not social creatures (as we usually define social), they are laying foundations at this age that will guide social interactions for the rest of their lives.

Stage 2: Ages 2-5

Stage 2 begins the *preoperational* cognitions in the child. They are grossly egocentric in their ability to take another person's perspective. Kohlberg characterizes their moral thinking as simply a fear of punishment. *We must be obedient or else*.

Erikson suggests it is here that they learn to be autonomous and independent. A path that does not include this learning will be sown with shame, self-doubt, lack of self-esteem, and a reluctance to risk or to take control of life. Freud identified this issue of learning to take control over one's

Age	Freud *Psychosexual*	Piaget *Cognitive*	Fowler *Ultimacy*	Selman *Perspective*	Selman *Friendship*	Kegan *Ego*	Kegan *Ego*	Kohlberg *Moral*	Erikson *Identity*	Maslow *Motivation*
0	Oral	Sensorimotor	Undifferentiated		—	S: Reflexes O: None	Incorporative	—	Trust vs. Mistrust	Survival
1										
2	Anal	Preoperational	Intuitive-Projective	Egocentric		S: Impulses O: Reflexes	Impulsive	Punishment Obedience	Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt	Satisfaction
3					Momentary Playmates					
4	Phallic				One-Way Assistance				Initiative vs. Guilt	
5										
6	Latency	Concrete	Mythic-Literal	Social Informational	Two-Way, Fair Weather	S: Wishes O: Impulses	Imperial	Instramental	Industry vs. Inferiority	Safety
7										
8				Self-Reflective						
9					Intimate, Mutually Shared					
10				Mutual						
11										
12				Social and Convention-System						
13	Genital	Early Formal	Synthetic-Conventional		Mature Friendship	S: Mutuality O: Wishes	Interpersonal	Interpersonal	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Love and Belonging
14										

life, although he labeled it a function of toilet training.

While the child in Stage 1 was controlled by impulses, the child in Stage 2 can take control of the impulses--having impulses rather than be them (Kegan, 1982). The child is able to recognize things, but not apart from the perception of them.

Stage 3: Ages 6-12

Piaget labels this stage *concrete*, describing a conceptual array unable to think in the abstract. Selective attention is given to that which is practical, concrete, black-and-white. Fowler follows this diagnosis in describing the *mythic-literal* child. Unable to think critically or reflectively, unable to abstract or separate symbols from meaning, the child is confined to a form of logic that is parametered by wooden literalism.

The self-concept emerges for the first time, a perception of oneself. But as Selman reminds us, at the early ages of this stage, there is as yet no shared reality--no ability to construct another's point of view (Steuer, 1994). As the child moves toward the end of Stage 3, they enter what Selman calls the *mutual* stage, and they begin to understand other perspectives. Kohlberg calls this the stage of *instrumental* moral perception. While the child has an inability to understand and incorporate other perspectives, they are drawn to an understanding of what is socially defined as "nice."

The calmness of Freud's latency period is complemented by Kegan's understanding of the ability to be free of impulses. Kegan's *imperial* balance is to have the freedom to be independent, to

have some control over the environment. According to Kegan, there is no longer an internalization of other's voices in the construction of the self.

Erikson calls this stage *industry vs. inferiority*. The new-found freedom that Kegan describes leads to a need to be successful, to learn new skills, to accomplish small things along the way. This leads to a industry, a sense that I can do it, that risks are worth it. If a child is moving through this stage in a healthy developmental pathway, an inner locus of control will appear.

Stage 4: Ages 13 and following

In Stage 4, many of the precursors of adult attitude and behavior begin to appear. Many adults stay in early Stage 4 for their whole life.

Piaget describes this stage as *early formal*, an ability to think abstractly. A number of attempts have been made to extend Piaget's stages into adulthood, believeing that their is qualitative cognitive growth after age 13.

Selman calls this stage *mature friendship*, believing that perspective is finally beginning to be shared. Freud writes about the nature of relationships and how the libido seeks socially appropriate ways meet its needs. Erikson discusses the role of identity, and Kohlberg and Kegan both speak of the interpersonal nature of this stage. All of this is predicated on the ability to step outside one own need system and incorporate varying degrees of other's perspectives.

Fowler's *synthetic-conventional* stage is oriented toward relationships, and the beliefs of the community become the source of strength for this stage. The Stage 4 person cannot think reflective very well, but abstract thought is coming. Fowler would believe that Piaget was too optimistic with his growth projections of this stage.

Conclusions about the Theorists

Certainly, there are more similarities than differences among the theorists. While the ages when they describe the fundamental changes may differ by a year or two, the primary stages (0-1, 2-5, 6-12, 13 and following) seem to be running themes.

Questions about the cause of developmental growth continue. Are the changes preprogrammed? Are they caused by the profound social changes in the environment of the child? After all, age 2 is when they begin to use language, age 6 is when they go to kindergarten, and age 13 is puberty and-or Jr. high. Are the changes caused by cultural changes in the life of the child, or social-emotional growth based on experience and reflection.

All the theorists, perhaps, see one reality through different filters. They see different things because they look for different things.

Overview of Social Interaction

In childhood, the foundations of future relationships are laid. The patterns learned in childhood are the same kinds of patterns that children use as adolescents and adults (Duck, 1991).

Friendship-making is not instinctual or known genetically. Through most of human history, social competence came as a natural part of the socialization process. But for a variety of reasons, today the normal socialization process is weak in teaching social skills. But research suggests that the many and varied social skills can be developed and taught (Ladd, 1989).

Social competence involves a whole spectrum of skills, perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes. Social competence not only affects the number and quality of friendships, but also school grades, achievement, and even health.

Without friendships, children--even in the first grade--present a life that is despairing and unbearable. If friendships are difficult, children may respond by becoming gloppily dependent or angrily bitter. Socially withdrawn or rejected children end up in psychiatric institutions or in jail in a far, far greater percentage than the average population. In some studies, the number one predictor of adult psychopathology was being rejected as children.

Research in Minnesota prisons for females found that virtually every prisoner had socially incompetent childhoods--they were not loved and they did not form relationships (M. Ryan, personal communication). Research by Howells (1981) suggested that prisoners had immature ideas about friendship. Socially withdrawn or socially inept children have a lower "friendship age.

Yet, despite the immense importance of social competence, despite the fact that social competence is a better predictor of health and success than IQ, college degrees, or standardized outcome tests, still we allow social skills to develop on their own. We hope that the playground gods will smile on the children, and that social competence will "just kind of happen."

Self acceptance, of course, also plays a crucial role in the development of social interaction. Those children (and adults!) who cannot accept themselves will not be able to accept others. Those with a low self-esteem will be nervous or hostile, rejecting, and unpredictable. They will be meteorically unstable and will put up walls when they feel they are becoming vulnerable. Their agitated and irrational state sets up an interaction where the other actor does not know how to respond or give proper encouragement. The person with the low self-image interprets this social ambiguity in a hostile manner, confirming the idea that others are dangerous. It becomes a downward cycle. Fewer have friends, which makes them more isolated; more isolation makes for fewer friends. Children on the downward cycle try to find ways of acceptance, but those ways are usually incompetent and misguided.

Stanley Greenspan (1994) writes of five principles that support childhood development: 1) floor time--you play with them, but they direct the play. The adult is the assistant director, following their lead in play or conversation, trying to support and amplify the direction the child is moving. 2) problem solving time--discussing and negotiating differences and difficulties (not a part of floor time). 3) Identifying and empathizing with the child's point of view. 4) Breaking the challenge into small pieces--setting limits for the child.

Stage 1: Ages 0-2

The first stage of human friendships is from birth to age two. Children here appear to desire company, but they do not play together as much as play together as play in one another's presence.

Children at this age who are socially behind won't be helped significantly by more interactions. More likely, self-esteem would be a better focus of attention.

Stage 2: Ages 2-5

Children in this stage describe friends in concrete characteristics: "Jane is my friend because she lives in a big house," or "he's my friend because he runs fast." Friends are described by their physical or geographic characteristics. Because children focus on visible, concrete characteristics, boys tend to play with boys and girls tend to play with girls.

The primary characteristic of stage 2 is naive egocentrism. The children at stage 2 still think of their own needs and their side of the relationship. Friendships are generated when a playmate shares candy or gives them a turn. They are better about initiating action rather than responding to others (Selman, 1979). They are not genuinely concerned about other's needs; they do not yet recognize the give and take of relationships. Children's friendships change as quickly as children's needs change. It becomes a full-time job for children to understand who is their friend today, and who is not.

Greenspan (1993) calls this stage *The World is my Oyster*; future creativity, the social skill of curiosity, and their ability to dream are generated at this stage. They start to understand the varying degrees of emotion. "I'm a little mad," or "I'm very, very mad!"

Stage 2 is characterized by creativity, joint fantasy, and shared imagination. Skills and capacities of curiosity, ability to dream, boldness and richness of relationships are generated from the dynamics of this stage. The rich creativity of this stage is a two-edged sword. They can really be afraid of the monsters in the closet or the turtleheads under the bed. Children can be victimized by the perceived reality of their own imaginations.

Selman (Kostelnik, 1988) discusses the child's ability at this age to try on different social roles (leader, comic, comforter, computer). They experiment with behavior that is not "natural" for them. It is normal for children who are experimenting with a role to take it to the extreme--so a child who wants to be assertive becomes bossy and even socially aggressive. A child who wants to be a comic becomes hyper-silly and ridiculous.

Another characteristic of this stage is that children understand relationships enough to begin to develop triangles. "Mom won't let me do this, so I'll go ask my dad." "You can't be Megan's friend if you want to be my friend." The child may try to impress mommy at daddy's expense, or play one parent off the other. The child may put off one person to spend time with another. The child can play out rivalries--not one on one, but in threes. Now the child's play can be the bad guy attacking the helpless doll, but then the doll is rescued by the giant dinosaur. Sometimes imaginary friends are filling the role of the triangled need.

While the expression of this may be jarring for parents, it is a necessary part of development as children learn to flex their social muscles and begin to understand the complexity of dynamic social relationships (Greenspan, 1993).

The child at this stage is also in a *preoperational* cognitive level. This stage, with its characteristic irreversibility of thought, provides a unique dynamic in play. When children are playing together, and another child comes in later and expresses a desire to play, the latecomer child is frequently snubbed. "You can't play with us, we're already playing," is a regular comment heard in play settings. This is usually a cognitive dilemma, not a deliberate act of cruelty (Kostelnik, et.al., 1988). Children are not able to think through how to start the play again with a new person in the picture.

We can conceive of self-esteem as having two components, a stable and a dynamic component. The dynamic component is how we feel at a given time, on a given day. It can be extremely high and extremely low, all on a the same day. If someone says, you look nice today, our dynamic self-esteem goes up, but if someone gives us a rude gesture on the freeway, our dynamic self-esteem may go down. The stable self-esteem is the self-image that endures over the months and is difficult to change, unless there are repeated, consistent, and frequent messages to our dynamic self-esteem over the months and years.

At this stage, it may be that the child has no self-esteem of their own. In other words, they as yet have no stable self-esteem, only the dynamic. Therefore, what children do to each other has a profound effect on their feelings, even though the effects of that may be short lived. But the cumulative effects of the dynamic self-esteem may create a starting place for the stable self-esteem, which begins in stage 3.

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Stage 3: Ages 6-12

In stage 3, a reciprocity emerges. There is a certain tit-for-tat-ness, a *you take a turn and then I'll take a turn* mentality. Friendships move from a concern about their own needs into a more give-and-take relationship. There is still, however, a definition of reciprocity weighed heavily in terms of their own needs. In other words, the child at this age cries out "it's not fair," but fairness is defined in terms of getting their own way. As the child moves through stage 3, they define reciprocity in a manner less egocentric, and more toward an honest mutual collaboration.

Friends at this age share joint activities and provide concrete, practical experience. As they get older, they are more objective, and less self-centered. Still however, friendship is possessive: *a best friend with Lisa cannot also be best friends with Stacey.*

It is in stage 3 that children move out of the orientation of family relationships and move into a world of peers. Children begin to define themselves in terms of their social status, the pecking order on the playground (Greenspan, 1993). Children are experts and delineating who is the coolest, who runs the fastest, etc. The children are attentive to who plays with who and why.

Relations with peers is critical during this stage because it is with peers that children learn the give and take of relationships. While adults are critical in children's development, adults will always have more power because they are adults. They cannot learn the reciprocal nature of friendships from adults (Kostelnik, 1988).

As the children move through this stage, they begin to understand a self-perception apart from social status, and begin to define themselves based on internal perceptions.

Even popular children are frequently rebuffed. But a consistent message over time of rejection and alienation facilitates dropping out of school, delinquency, suicide, and mental health problems (Kostelnik, 1988). All children want friends, but they differ in the amount they need and the style they need.

Yet, there are still those who do not know how to be friends. They are constantly uncertain in their relationships. Called *hoverers*, they stand back more, lurk on the edge of the group. They show more indecision and move in too late after the rest have moved on. They automanipulate more, have a higher rate of daydreaming and an inability to concentrate. They adopt a pattern of pleading and whining. Hovering is a warning sign of a child who may be on the road to rejection, alienation, and subsequent aggressive and at-risk behaviors (Kostelnik, 1988).

Stage 4: Ages 13 and following

Stage 4 begins with a recognition that friends have rights and relationships that are independent of oneself. One friend, they realize, cannot fill all my needs--and even if they could, that is not necessarily even desirable. Friendship becomes a mutual sharing of intimacy, secrets, and is based on trust and acceptance of each other.

Self-esteem becomes more stable. No longer is the young adolescent tossed to and fro by every compliment or caustic quip. The dynamic self-esteem is still attentive to what others think, and in most cases is more attentive than before. But the stable self-esteem grows in its saliency.

Self-definition becomes more sophisticated. They are forced to take on many roles and tasks before they are emotionally mature enough to do so (Elkind, 1988).

With early formal operations comes true moral thinking, more than just a fear of punishment or a egocentric definition of niceness, guide behavior and attitudes.

Conclusion

Social development follows the same patterns as the other perspectives of development. Knowing social development and the deepening patterns of friendship can help those who work with children in their tasks of guidance and the learning of social skills.

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